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ABSTRACT

Some of the most common predictions relating to university continuing education units provide a base from which a discussion of future strategies can begin. These include the following: the Big Generation (i.e., baby boomers) is here; knowledge, not products, is the major focus of society; competition for the traditional university continuing education market is increasing; high unemployment and rapid job dislocation will continue; work and learning are becoming more inseparable; more people will demand learning for more years of their life; specialization and segmentation of audiences in education will continue; and consumers, not providers, determine content and format of learning. Six broad strategies have been suggested to assist continuing education units in universities with confronting the uncertainties of the future effectively. They are (1) mission clarity; (2) reframed relations with host universities; (3) rethought approaches to programming (specialization and market positioning, use of new marketing technologies, "getting closer to the customer," changed outlooks and competencies); (4) enhanced research and development; (5) revised structures and management; and (6) increased inter-university networking, information sharing, and collaborative research. (YLB)

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University Continuing Education: Strategies for an Uncertain Future

A Paper Presented to the 1985
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Introduction

The literature on the future of continuing education is long on forecasts, and short on strategies. We are promised magnificent opportunities, exciting new markets, and incredible technologies in the forthcoming lifelong learning society. Yet just how one gets there from here is not very clear.

The purpose of this paper is to address this latter weakness, that is, the lack of strategies. Based on the literature, and our own thinking and experience, we propose several strategies which, while not necessarily sufficient, are important to consider as we strive to reach the new promised land.

The Forecasts: Future Factors

Data and opinion about the shape of the near future abound. Some of the most common predictions provide a base from which a discussion of future strategies can begin. Those which relate to university continuing education units include the following:

1. The Big Generation is here. Those now between 19 and 34 years of age, some 6,700,000 Canadians, represent a 30-50% over-strength or bulge in terms of normal demographic patterns (Kettle, 1980). This is the age group which university continuing education now serves best. With a decrease in the traditional college age group, and the expected move on the part of universities to shift their emphasis to part-time learners, continuing education units have a great opportunity to provide leadership in penetrating this new market.

2. We are now experiencing the post-industrial, third-wave (Toffler, 19__; Naisbitt, 1982) era in which knowledge, rather than products, is the major focus of society, and in which rapid change and

technological advances no longer make traditional approaches to planning appropriate. We are experiencing a period of fundamental change and discontinuity (Niebuhr, 1984). Pro-active, strategic and anticipatory planning are more compatible with the Learning Society of the future (Botkin, Elmandjra and Mulitza, 1979; Boshier, 1984).

3. Competition for the traditional university continuing education market is increasing. This competition is coming not only from other traditional post-secondary institutions, but also from the private sector, now regarded as the fastest growing segment of the education industry (Landsburg, 1982; Cross, 1983). The traditional roles of providers are becoming more blurred and overlapping.

4. High unemployment and rapid job dislocation, driven by technological revolution, will continue into the 1990's (U.S. National Advisory Council on Continuing Education, 1983; Science Council of Canada, 1985).

5. Work and learning are becoming more and more inseparable: recurrent learning has become widely accepted as the wave of the future (Learning a Living, 1983). The "linear lifeplan" is giving way to the "blended lifeplan" (Cross, 1983).

6. There will be a greater demand by more people for learning for more years of their life. They will demand high quality learning opportunities which meet their specific needs at times and locations, and in formats which are convenient to them, especially in view of competing demands from job and family (Cross, 1983). They will have less allegiance to any one provider, but will turn to those providers which best meet their varied and specialized needs in terms of content, convenience and costs as the occasion demands.

7. Specialization and segmentation of audiences in education will be the mark of the future. Mass marketing is giving way to specialized products developed for specialized market groups in retailing (Steinberg, 1983) as well as in education. "De-massification" is the new watchword (Toffler, 1985). The ability to identify and sense these market niches, and to maintain customer loyalty, will be one of the criterion of a successful continuing education programme of the future.

8. The power to determine both content and format of learning has switched dramatically from the hands of the provider into the hands of the education consumer, or their collective representatives. Education has become a market-driven commodity, fueled by competition and diversity. Consortia of users, such as Further Education Councils and Higher Education Consortia in Alberta, as well as professional associations, large corporations and governments are now strongly influencing decisions about the kind and quality of education to be provided and we can expect an acceleration of this trend.

Critical Strategies

These highly volatile, changing, and discontinuous times require rethinking traditional and habitual approaches by continuing education units. Six broad strategies are suggested which can assist continuing education units in universities to effectively confront the uncertainties of the future: mission clarity; reframed relations with the host university; re-thought approaches to programming; enhanced research and development; revised structures and management, and increased inter-university networking, information sharing, and collaborative research.

1. Mission Clarity

University continuing education units must clearly articulate why they are in business, what it is they do, how they do it, and whom and where they serve. This working philosophy is necessary:

- to guide and channel the efforts of the continuing education unit staff and provide focus for diverse activities
- to explain the continuing education unit's place within the institution to the university community
- to inform other continuing education agencies and institutions in the community of the university's specific involvement and contribution to the learning society
- to clearly define the continuing education unit's student body, the scope of its programs and its "market segment"
- to assist in making choices for allocating scarce resources

As a starting point in developing a unit's mission clarity, it is beneficial to consider the development of a "Mission Statement"; that is, a general expression of the basic purpose of the organization. The statement should include:

- the purpose or main thrust of the unit
- the product or service provided
- special technologies or approaches
- the market served
- the constraints within which the Mission is carried out

(King and Cleland, 1979)

Just as universities cannot provide educational programs for everyone, continuing education units must restrict their activities in

accordance with their major goals and mandates. As sub-units in a larger system, it is necessary that there be a great deal of congruence between the missions of the university and the mission of the continuing education division or faculty. Failure to recognize the interrelation between the needs, goals and values of the two, and the constraints thus placed on the continuing education unit, can lead to perceived and real marginality, separation and a sense of impotence. Any effective continuing education mission statement must take into consideration the important values and expectations of its host.

Following is a composite of three statements developed by members of the staff of the Faculty of Continuing Education at The University of Calgary:

> The Faculty of Continuing Education sees (potentially all of society) as its clientele and attempts to promote values of responsiveness to learning needs, accessibility and opportunity. It aspires to promote these values through consultation, co-operation and collaboration with appropriate groups and organizations, and through its special expertise in the designing and offering of learning opportunities.

> The Faculty recognizes that it has a responsibility to further the overall mission of the University, and that in meeting its own mission, it is contributing to that larger mandate. Specifically the Faculty's mission is expressed through several major thrusts: It
> - extending the resources and expertise of the University to the community through credit and non-credit formats;

- meeting indentified educational needs through utilizing other community resources;
- providing educational opportunities for members of the University community;
- conducting research in the fields of adult and continuing education;
- teaching in the fields of adult and continuing education;
- providing leadership in the fields of adult and community education to the University and the community;
- facilitating the development and dissemination of knowledge and promoting learning through a variety of means including conference support, individualized learning programs, seminars, courses and conferences, counselling and guidance, distance education and communications technologies, and administrative infra-structures.

While this statement in itself lends greater clarity to the major directions of the continuing education unit and the most appropriate courses of action, those involved in developing such statements find equal value in the process of developing it. It is through this process that key values become articulated, possible conflicting assumptions are identified, and a sense of commitment and involvement occur, a finding reinforced by King and Cleland (1979). Because conditions change and new expectations arise, the mission of the organization must be regarded as constantly evolving, a phenomenon which permits (and demands) constant review and updating, and consequent involvement and re-commitment by those who must carry it out.

Mission statements of university continuing education units will vary considerably between institutions, reflecting the uniqueness of each unit in terms of values, resources, opportunities, strengths, weaknesses, leadership and environments.

2. Reframing Relations with Host Universities

Much has been made of the marginality of adult education units within their host institutions.

> Marginality is one of the most ubiquitous and persistent themes in the literature of adult education (Devlin 1982, p.4)

Many reasons may be cited for the "second-class-citizen" designation we are all accustomed to hearing, mainly from those within the discipline of continuing education:

- adult education is not a profession but is a social movement
- adult educators have not been able to penetrate the traditional decision-making establishment of universities
- continuing educators are different - they do not teach and conduct research and thus are not accepted as peers.
- the Institution has no real commitment to its service function but pays only "lip-service" to this role

However, the situation in universities is changing and changing rapidly. University enrolments in the 18-24 year-old age group are declining. Government funding is being curtailed or reduced. University presidents are promoting university-corporate joint activities (Maxwell & Currie, 1984), contract research, and resource-sharing arrangements. Technology transfer to capitalize on the saleable inventions and processes developed at universities is the current popular phrase.

University presidents are quoting from Corporate Classrooms (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1985) the huge sums of money being spent by industry on education and training. There

is renewed interest in part-time students, co-op programs and even distance education.

An address to the Spring 1985 graduation class of the U of C, by its Academic Vice President, extolled the virtues of lifelong learning! Quoting Toffler of 15 years ago in Future Shock he stated that those who will be illiterate in the year 2000 will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn and relearn.

Our President is stating publicly that the University should consider assembling elite instructional teams to sell knowledge and expertise to the corporate sector.

We agree with Patricia Cross who states "the role of higher education in society is changing and that institutions that fail to recognize the emergence of the Learning Society and their new role in it are indeed in trouble" (Cross, 1983b). For those in continuing higher education it should be a time of exhilaration, change and profound challenge.

While we may believe that survival is the wrong reason for universities to embrace the Learning Society, it is the most powerful and will drive change unlike more altruistic motives. The degree to which continuing education units are seen by their university administrations as relevant and helpful in making the necessary changes to survive and flourish will be the degree to which they will be seen as essential units to maintain. If they are seen as irrelevant, obstructionist, or in direct competition with other units, chances are good that moves will be made to disband the continuing education unit and to farm-out their funtions to other campus units seen as more relevant and willing to support the concerns of the overall university.

Now is the time to forcefully put once again our message to our senior administrations. Education for life must be the focus of our universities. There must be changes in the system - new programs, new services, new administrative structures, new financing. Continuing educators have an opportunity to participate and play a leading role in the reshaping of their institutions. However, we must keep in mind that most university faculty members and administrators are blissfully unaware of the emergence of the Learning Society, and, as Cross states, they have no idea that corporate education is the fastest growing educational enterprise.

Competition for the new learner markets will occur not only at the continuing education division or department level, but between whole institutions. Non-university, post-secondary education is the fastest growing sector of education in Alberta (Alberta Advanced Education, 1984) and there is no reason to doubt that this is not true nationally. Universities will be forced into doing better jobs as centres of specialization for smaller and more specialized markets brought about by increased competition and diversification in the educational marketplace. Leadership and support for this move to specialization by continuing education divisions or faculties will go far in ensuring the survival and thriving of both the unit and the host. Where continuing education units can be most effective and strategic is in the extension function whereby subject-matter units are aided in developing, diffusing, and gaining recognition for their expertise while at the same time, assisting these units to seek new needs for their expertise, and develop new expertise for important client needs. If this is done well, continuing education units will gain greater freedom and tolerance to

engage in those other activities which it values, but which are seen by the larger institution as less important.

3. Rethinking Programming

A third strategy, or rather a set of strategies, relate to program development and marketing. Specialization and market positioning, use of new marketing technologies and approaches, "getting closer to the customer", and changed outlooks and competencies constitute some major challenges which, if met, will help continuing education units to creatively confront an uncertain future.

a) Specialization and Market Positioning. Continuing education faculties and divisions face reduced resources and an increased demand to make every dollar count. They are forced now to make choices amongst many contending, and equally valid programming directions, in an environment which is becoming more competitive and changing. How might these units develop choices which will not only answer the needs for survival, but make a legitimate contribution as well?

We contend that continuing education units need to more concisely define those groups upon which it can have most impact, and aggressively carve out those market niches. Selection of appropriate segments is very much in tune with the move to specialization in educational markets (Draves, 1984).

Many opportunities exist for selecting and serving specialized populations. Appendix A contains just a few of the potential markets gleaned from a reading of the literature. We are not proposing that all units will become specialists. That of course will depend on the nature

of the area they serve, and the degree of competition which exists. We do contend, however, that a realistic assessment of their position in the market is essential so that conscious and informed choices are made about their potential future directions, and thus informed decisions about how to get these can be taken.

b) Using New Marketing Technologies. Many of today's marketing specialists exhibit exemplary program planning skills. Unfortunately, not all programmers exhibit competent marketing skills. "Marketing" still smacks of something less than noble in many programmers' and administrators' minds. Shucksterism, hard sell, gimicks and give-aways often represent our image of this "unclean" occupation.

Sophisticated surveys, opinion polls, market analysis, telephone surveys, psycho-genic profiles, environment and market scanning, product-testing, forecasting, and focus groups - now stock-in-trade techniques for marketing graduates - are being employed by all aspects of society, from unions and political parties to radio stations and toothpaste companies in order to more clearly define their audiences, potential audiences, advertising strategies, and product potential.

Some continuing education units are becoming very adept at the use of marketing approaches to ascertain present and future markets and approaches. Those units in universities which do not harness the full potential of marketing and promoting technologies and strategies may find that they are being outflanked by private or public providers who have more willingly employed such techniques to create and package specialized knowledge for demanding and sophisticated segments of learners.

c) Getting Closer to the Customer. It is our contention that despite the rhetoric of needs analysis and program planning, we in university continuing education are not as good as we could be at, as Peters and Waterman (1983) have popularized "Getting Close to the Customer". The ability to clearly identify the needs of present clients, to respond appropriately, and to pinpoint and service new clients, may be one of the most crucial skills for future effectiveness.

The technology to do so has become more exacting and more sophisticated, and includes many of the techniques used in marketing, and mentioned previously, as well as more common needs identification approaches such as participant observation, post-meeting reaction surveys, and advisory groups, and plain involvement.

The increase in competition for the adult learner, the move to market segmentation and to provider specialization, and the growing power of the educated consumer suggests that continuing education units which ignore the need to become highly sophisticated at staying "close to the customer" will do so at their peril.

Consumers are not attracted to continuing education programs in universities only because of the program content. These programs represent something more: enhanced prestige; confirmation of lifestyle; job advancement; increased potential for income and security; leisure; antidotes to loneliness; entertainment and intellectural stimulation; solutions to problems; increased productivity; or a mental health break.

Understanding the world from the learner's or client's perspective allows one to not only package subject matter in keeping with the learner's needs, but also allows one to re-vamp services and marketing strategies to more accurately square with their world-view, and to do so

differentially, recognizing the unique characteristics of each sub-market.

Continuing education units must learn how to get close to and understand, not only groups of individuals, but brokers for groups of individuals such as professional associations, educational consortia, and agents of corporations and governments who seek educational packages to meet such collective needs and goals as increased productivity or decreased unemployment.

d) Changed Outlooks and Competencies. Those university continuing education faculties or divisions which will be most effective in the next decade, will be those who change their perspectives, and whose faculty and programmers will have gained additional skills and orientations, some of which we have alluded to earlier.

Linear, projective planning will have to give way to anticipatory, pro-active and strategic management which can cope with rapid change and discontinuity. Much of the literature on program planning still appears based on lock-stopped and reactive planning. Visionary, anticipatory programming whereby needs are identified well before the learner is able to know what they need is now only beginning to permeate the writings on program planning (Boshier, 1984). This does not suggest that continuing education units should set themselves up as visionaries who are only qualified to plan for the learner's future knowledge needs, although the skills of competent programmers must include the ability to anticipate, and to risk new ventures and directions. Skill in helping learners learn how to scan for future learning requirements, and learn strategies to achieve these must be added to the repetoire of our programmers.

Programmers will also be expected to have better skills to understand learning from the learner's perspective. In its move to professionalization, adult education has uncritically accepted the framework of education, especially in program planning, despite its claim to uniqueness by being "androgogical" in its methodology. Essentially, it adopted the Tyler curriculum planning model (Apps, 1979) which assumes that one can facilitate learning by certain normative procedures, called program planning. Growing data and opinion suggest that adult learning is far more complex, unique and idiosyncratic, and is rarely compatible with prescriptive, cohort-based models such as the program planning or curriculum models (Tough, 1971; Day and Baskett, 1983; Baskett, 1984).

Given rapid change and lack of clarity about the future, we may be doing a disservice to programmers to suggest that there is a proven technology, called program planning, which will serve them, and the learners they serve, in the future. We may, in fact, be preparing dinosaurs in our degree and non degree training of professional adult educators. Those who are able to think critically, take risks, understand the perspective of the learner, and use new marketing and futures approaches in creative, innovative, and anticipatory ways will, we believe, be those best equipped for the learning society, and for serving future learners.

(e) Enhanced Research and Development Several authors have noted the need for enhanced research and development in continuing education units or higher education (Draves, 1984; Cookingham, 1985; Warren, 1980).

Research and development is essential to innovative continuing education units. However, research and development activities must be seen as supportive to the group's mission. Thus trend forecasting, environmental scanning, literature awareness, and research studies must focus on, and inform the practice of, the unit and those responsible for carrying out its mission.

For those unit members involved in teaching and research as part of their function, enhanced research and development creates a happy coincidence, as both of these functions benefit from the applied nature of institutional research and development, which in turn is made more rich through academic study and involvement.

4. Revised Structures and Management

The ability to respond effectively in times of unanticipated, discontinuous change requires not only the application of old solutions, but also the development of innovative solutions. Innovations require flexible people with flexible attitudes in flexible organizations which are able to respond to the unexpected, and to support the invention of innovative solutions. Rules, culture, organization and rewards must be compatible with this type of challenge.

Continuing Education Units have many characteristics of the innovative organization, and these need to be enhanced, while removing inappropriate characteristics and building additional components.

The specific structure and approach required of continuing education units in order to appropriately respond to future challenges will reflect the unique situations and conditions of each unit. There

There are, however, a number of principles which we believe are central to effective organization and response.

(a) Response-ability. The structure should allow the shortest route to get things done. Committees, positions, support units should be so designed as to enhance the programmer's ability to respond to their specific clientele.

(b) Simple. Regulatory procedures and bodies should be at a minimum, and those which cannot be dispensed with be streamlined so as to not get in the way of the mission of the unit at minimum, and ideally, to support the mission.

(c) Flexible. The ability to adapt is crucial. (Maxwell & Currie, 1984, Jacobs, 1979). Few "standing committees" should exist. Project teams can be created and disbanded as needs arise and cease to exist. These can be created to do specific tasks outside of the skeleton structure of the unit, somewhat akin to "Skunk works" (Peters and Waterman, 1981) or "independent cells" (Mandell, 19__). Failure of the cells will not mean failure of the core of the continuing education unit.

(d) Mission-driven. Not only is mission clarity required, but the structures and culture of the unit need to be such that they constantly reflect the key values of the unit and their university. This means that all parts understand the prime values, and are encouraged to adapt and change to enhance those values.

Such units will have structures which ensure quick, informal feedback and communication amongst all parts and the whole. Frequent meetings and get-togethers which focus on improvement, rather than maintenance, will characterize such units. Actions will flow out of an

understanding of the mission, which serves as a beacon towards which one steers rather than as a barriers which one must surmount.

At the same time, there must be ways by which new ideas or programs can be realistically tested internally, prior to coming on stream. Small response panels, with rotating membership and no regulatory power might be one such means. Such panels have the added advantage of helping to clarify and articulate the qualities, values, and standards against which the unit judges the operationalization of its mission.

5. Increased Inter-University Networking, Information-Sharing, and Collaborative Research

To ensure maximum effectiveness in serving their various clients, continuing education units can, and do, learn from each other. CAUCE should be encouraged to aggressively provide leadership in identifying the major issues and burning questions of its members, commission studies which would help answer those questions, and facilitate their dissemination. Most of the parts of such a mechanism already exist. We have the means to identify the issues, the capabilities to undertake the research and study, and the resources and opportunities to disseminate the results.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to share with you our experience, ideas and the results of our review of the literature which we are now trying to integrate to help answer questions about future directions for our own unit. They do not represent the official view of the Faculty, rather, they are intended as a stimulus to help launch us into discussions about how we can best achieve our mission. We hope that in

the process, we have stimulated you in your examination of how to confront an uncertain future.

APPENDIX A

New Markets and Program Directions for the Future

(A list compiled from the literature by H.K. Baskett, Faculty of Continuing Education, The University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, T2N 1N4. You are welcome to copy this list, and are invited to communicate new market ideas and their sources to the compiler).

Liberal Arts	Selleck (1983) Chronicle of Higher Education (1984) Zwerling (1985)
High Tech	Selleck (1983)
Learning Strategies (learning how to learn, pro-active strategies)	Farquharson (1983) Tough (1971) Botkin et al (1979) Smith & Haverkamp (1977)
Health Professions	Vagianos (1983)
Areas of Rapid Change - eg. computers	Vagianos (1983)
Retraining	U.S. National Advisory Council on Continuing Education (1983) McDonald (1985) Minister of Employment and Immigration (1984)
Leisure Education for the Aging	
Training in Care of the Aging	
Links with Business and Industry	U.S. National Advisory Council on Continuing Education (1983) Vagianos (1983) Maxwell and Currie (1984) Stewart U.S. General Accounting Office (1983)
Women returning to work/ learning	

Professionals at a distance from learning institutions	
Mature adults wishing to return to/ begin a university education	
Train - the Trainers	Odiorne (1985)
Education for leisure	Selleck (1983)
Broader education for rapid change	Selleck (1983)
Part-time and mature credit students	Selleck (1983) Vagianos (1983)
Employment-related training	CAUCE Bulletin Vol. 17, No. 1, p.6
Educational services (instructing, counselling, credentialling)	Jacobs (1979)
Information industry	
Broker of other's instructional packages (eg. Plato) "One Stop Knowledge Shop"	
Education/training of adult educators	
Human Resource Development	
Business Education	
Contract Research	Maxwell and Currie (1984)
Cooperative Education	
Industrial Extension	U.S. General Accounting Office (1983)

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